

The Question of the Treatment of Women in Afghanistan

Background:

Afghanistan has a long history of patriarchal attitudes and practices, which have contributed to the marginalization of women and girls. Before the Taliban came to power in 1996, women in Afghanistan had some level of participation in public life, including in education and the workforce. However, the Taliban's rule brought with it a strict interpretation of Islamic law that severely restricted women's rights and freedoms.

During the Taliban's rule, women were banned from working outside the home, attending school, and leaving the house without a male guardian. Women were also required to wear a burqa, a full body covering that completely obscured their faces, and were subjected to harsh punishments for violating the Taliban's laws, including public floggings and executions.

After the Taliban regime was ousted in 2001, there were significant improvements in women's rights and access to education and healthcare. Women gained the right to vote and to participate in public life, and many women entered the workforce and pursued higher education. However, progress has been slow and uneven, with many women still facing significant discrimination and violence.

In recent years, the situation for women in Afghanistan has deteriorated due to increased violence and political instability. Women continue to face discrimination and violence, including forced marriage and domestic violence. The return of the Taliban to power in 2021 has raised further concerns about the treatment of women in Afghanistan, with reports of women being forced to stay at home and being banned from attending school or work in some areas.

Definitions:

1. Gender-based violence (GBV): Violence that is directed at an individual based on his or her biological sex or gender identity. GBV can take many forms, including

SOCHUM 2

physical, sexual, and psychological violence, and can occur in both public and private spaces. Women and girls are often the primary victims of GBV.

2. **Patriarchy:** A social system in which men hold primary power and dominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of property. Patriarchy is often associated with the marginalization and oppression of women.
3. **Gender equality:** The concept that all people, regardless of their gender, should have equal access to rights, opportunities, and resources. Gender equality is about creating a society in which women and men have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities to participate fully in all aspects of life.
4. **Women's empowerment:** The process by which women gain the power and agency to participate fully in all aspects of life. Women's empowerment includes the ability to access education and healthcare, to participate in decision-making processes, and to control their own lives and bodies.
5. **Human rights:** The fundamental rights and freedoms that are considered to be inherent to all human beings, regardless of their nationality, race, gender, or any other status. Human rights include civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, and are protected under international law.

Key Points to consider:

1. Restriction of freedom of movement and restrictive dress codes
2. No protection for women and girls threatened by violence
3. Forced and child marriage: Combatting poverty and the spoils of war
4. Girls are losing the right to an education
5. Women have few opportunities to work

SOCHUM 2

6. Women's rights work within civil society under severe pressure
7. Not foreseen: Political participation by women
8. High rates of infant and maternal mortality

Previous Actions:

1. UN Security Council Resolution 1325: In 2000, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325, which called for the participation of women in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction efforts. The resolution recognizes the importance of women's participation in decision-making processes and highlights the need for gender-sensitive approaches to peacebuilding.
2. UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA): Since 2002, UNAMA has been working in Afghanistan to support the Afghan government and people in the areas of peace and reconciliation, governance, development, and human rights. UNAMA has been particularly active in advocating for the protection of women's rights and has provided support for women's participation in political processes and civil society.
3. UN Women: UN Women is the UN entity dedicated to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide. In Afghanistan, UN Women has been working to support women's participation in political processes, increase access to education and healthcare, and prevent violence against women and girls. UN Women has also been working with the Afghan government to implement international commitments to protect women's rights.
4. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW): Afghanistan ratified CEDAW in 1980, which requires states to eliminate discrimination against women and promote gender equality. The UN has been advocating for the full implementation of CEDAW in Afghanistan and has provided support for the Afghan government to meet its obligations under the convention.
5. The UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women: The UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women is a global grant-making mechanism that supports innovative projects to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls. In Afghanistan, the UN Trust Fund has supported projects to provide legal aid and psychosocial support to survivors of gender-based violence and to increase awareness of women's rights and the importance of gender equality.

Questions To Consider

1. What are the main challenges facing women in Afghanistan in terms of their access to education, healthcare, and employment?
2. How has the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan affected the situation for women in the country?
3. What role can the UN and other international organizations play in promoting women's rights and gender equality in Afghanistan?
4. What strategies can be employed to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in Afghanistan?
5. How can Afghan women be better included in decision-making processes at all levels of government and society?

Useful Links

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/in-focus/2022/08/in-focus-women-in-afghanistan-one-year-after-the-taliban-takeover><https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/01/18/afghanistan-taliban-deprive-women-livelihoods-identity>

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/08/1124662>

The Issue of the Protection of Child Refugees

Background:

The issue of the protection of child refugees is a pressing concern that needs to be addressed by the international community. Children who are forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in other countries face a range of challenges, including lack of access to education, healthcare, and protection from exploitation and abuse.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are currently over 30 million children worldwide who have been forcibly displaced from their homes. These children are among the most vulnerable members of society, and their protection is a moral imperative that must be addressed urgently.

One of the most critical steps that can be taken to protect child refugees is to ensure that they are able to access education. Education is a basic human right, and it is also essential for the long-term well-being of child refugees. Education can provide children with the skills and knowledge they need to build a better future for themselves and their communities. However, access to education is often limited for child refugees, as they may face language barriers, discrimination, and lack of resources.

Another important step is to ensure that child refugees have access to adequate healthcare. Child refugees may have experienced trauma and may need mental health services, as well as physical healthcare. It is essential that child refugees have access to healthcare services that are appropriate for their needs and that are provided in a safe and supportive environment.

Additionally, child refugees are at high risk of exploitation, abuse, and violence. It is essential that measures are taken to protect them from these dangers. This may include providing safe shelter, as well as support services to help children recover from trauma and build resilience.

SOCHUM 2

In order to address these challenges, it is important for the international community to work together to provide support to child refugees. This includes providing funding and resources to organizations that work directly with child refugees, as well as supporting policies and programs that prioritize the needs of these vulnerable children.

Definitions:

Refugee- A child or young person is a refugee if they have had to leave their country to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.

Asylum seeker - a person who has left their home country as a political refugee and is seeking asylum in another.

Internally displaced people (IDPs)- someone who has not crossed an international border to find safety. Unlike refugees, IDPs stay within their own country.

Stateless person - someone who, under national laws, does not enjoy citizenship - the legal bond between a government and an individual - in any country.

Key Facts:

1. Around half of the world's 26 million refugees are under the age of 18
2. 85% of the world's refugees are accommodated in developing countries
3. The UK received 3,762 asylum applications from separated children in 2021
4. In proportion to its population, the UK ranks 14th in Europe for asylum applications
5. In 2019, 68% of the world's refugees came from just five countries: Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Myanmar
6. 45% of separated children applying for asylum in the UK in the year up to June 2020 were from Iran, Vietnam and Afghanistan
7. There were 676,300 first-time asylum applications in the EU in 2019, with Germany and France receiving the most

SOCHUM 2

8. Of the age disputes raised by the Home Office in 2019, over half were found to be less than 18 years old
9. The number of refugees globally has steadily increased since 2012 but within Europe, the number of asylum-seeker applications has significantly decreased from 1.3m in 2016 to 676,300 in 2019
10. In the last decade 400,000 unaccompanied and separated children have lodged asylum applications throughout the world
11. The number of separated children internationally has decreased since 2015 with numbers in Europe following a similar pattern, dropping from 95,205 to 17,890 in 2019
12. The grant rate for asylum or other forms of leave for separated children in 2019 was 79%
13. In 2020, worldwide, 21,000 children applied for asylum having arrived in the country of refuge alone, with no parent or guardian
14. An inspection of the Asylum Intake Unit in Kent in September concluded that there are significant concerns that the Home Office is not complying with its duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of separated children

Previous Actions:

The United Nations (UN) has taken several actions to address the issue of the protection of child refugees. Some key actions and initiatives include:

1. **The Convention on the Rights of the Child:** The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, is a landmark international human rights treaty that sets out the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of children. The Convention has been ratified by all UN member states except the United States.
2. **The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants:** In 2016, the UN General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which outlines a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges of forced displacement. The Declaration includes a specific commitment to protecting the rights and well-being of child refugees.
3. **The Global Compact on Refugees:** In 2018, the UN General Assembly adopted the Global Compact on Refugees, which aims to improve the international response to forced displacement by strengthening the protection of refugees and supporting the countries and communities that host them. The Compact includes specific

SOCHUM 2

provisions to protect and support child refugees, including by promoting access to education and other services.

4. The UNHCR Children on the Move Initiative: The UNHCR Children on the Move Initiative is a program that seeks to provide protection and support to children who are forced to migrate or who are displaced from their homes. The program includes a range of activities, including the provision of education, healthcare, and protection services, as well as support for family reunification.
5. The Safe Schools Declaration: The Safe Schools Declaration is an international political commitment to protect schools and universities from attack during armed conflict. The Declaration was opened for endorsement in 2015 and has been endorsed by more than 100 countries to date. Protecting schools and universities is essential for ensuring that child refugees have access to education.

Questions to Consider:

1. What are the current legal frameworks and protections in place for child refugees?
2. What are the roles of government and non-governmental organisations?
3. What impact has COVID-19 had on child refugees?
4. How can we promote greater awareness and understanding of the issues faced by child refugees, and how can we work together to address these challenges and protect the rights of these vulnerable children?

Useful Links:

<https://www.unhcr.org/uk/children.html>

<https://www.unicef.org/eca/emergencies/refugee-and-migrant-children-europe>

<https://www.savethechildren.org/us/what-we-do/emergency-response/refugee-children-crisis>

The Question of Freedom of the Press in BRICs

Background

These countries, individually and collectively, have seen some of the highest growth rates in their media industries.

For instance, since the early 1990s, Indian television has grown exponentially with more than 800 channels, out of which roughly 300 are round-the-clock all-news channels available in multiple languages. There are 330 million newspapers sold daily in the country. Second only to China, a staggering 900 000 million, about 75% of the population, have access to mobile phones.

In China, with the weakening of old ideological shackles, there are 2 200 newspapers catering to 500 million people and a television industry which, although highly controlled, reaches approximately 700 million people daily.

Brazil and South Africa have emerged as the biggest media centres in their continents. Russian government claims a 24% growth in media economy in the last decade, the fastest growth of any media market in the world. Such explosive media growth also brings up thorny questions of media freedom, accountability, and independence.

Definitions

BRICS- The inspiration for the collective term BRICs, coined by Goldman Sachs in 2003, stems from the realisation that five countries in the world - Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa - are poised to be the top world economies by 2050.

Key Points

SOCHUM 2

The concept of accountability, in modern democracies, is linked to the possession of power. Those who wield power are expected to answer for how they use it. Journalists are often seen as those who wield power of information dissemination.

The past few years have been dramatic for the media in BRICs countries. With the proliferation of internet, iPhones, and other hand-held mobile devices, the possibility of user empowerment has dramatically increased. A new relationship between society and the media has evolved.

The possibilities of public participation in debates about the quality of media content and governance have increased, be it on the level of actor transparency or on the level of post-production correction. This is especially true in the democracies of India, South Africa, and Brazil but also true in a non-democracy like China and an illiberal democracy like Russia.

China hosts some 300 million microblog accounts, and officials say that domestic social media put out more than 200 million posts every day. These microblogs have become the main source of media and political accountability.

The high-speed rail collision in Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, in July 2011 was the turning point. The government took a beating by public opinion over the crash, in large part because social media harnessed anger over the bungled rescue effort, the safety of the high-speed rail network and corruption in the Railways Ministry.

In India, we have seen large street protests against corruption and sexual violence. Dubbed the “India Spring”, these protests have been brought about by wall-to-wall television media coverage of political and police corruption, an increasing gender gap, and daily violence against women. The 240-million strong urban middle class, the primary consumers of the new media, is seeking more political and media accountability.

In Brazil, resistance to the tearing down of favelas or slums in Rio de Janeiro to gear up for the 2016 Olympics has resulted in young Brazilians posting videos on websites and on Twitter. Such social-media activism has forced the otherwise pro-Olympics mainstream media to write and cover news stories of illegal bulldozing of properties.

And in Russia, the high-profile killings of two prominent anti-Kremlin journalists, Anna Politkovskaya and Alexander Litvinenko, in 2006 and 2007 respectively, has

resulted in an increased awareness among the Russian public about how important freedom of press and media accountability are.

Future and Questions to Consider

In India, Brazil and South Africa, as democratic institutions such as the judiciary and electorate politics consolidate the press is likely to remain free.

While in South Africa we have witnessed efforts by the government to curtail freedom of the press, in India we have seen a commercially driven press abuse its freedom and act unethically. A truly accountable and free press in a democratic society is not only assured in the written law but must hold itself accountable for unethical lapses and must create an environment where journalists can work without fear for their safety or of legal repercussions.

In China and Russia existing political systems do not provide any guarantee for media freedom and accountability. The latest BRICs heads of state meeting, held in Durban, South Africa, in March 2013, had many issues on the agenda such as unemployment, establishing of a development-oriented bank, and environmental concerns. There was no discussion about freedom of the press or media accountability.